

THE MATAVERI AIRPORT has been upgraded with a more modern ticket counter, making the check-in more in line with what one sees at other airports. There is easier access to the departure lounge, where there is a new and very large statue carved from a tree (see below). Other carvings by local islanders are displayed in the departure area. A covered ramada-like structure is under construction outside the airport entrance. It will accommodate those selling shell necklaces and other curios to arriving or departing tourists. This will move those selling items from their current location, on the sidewalk just outside the airport, where they now block traffic. Best of all is the baggage carousel and now there are even carts for luggage. Just like uptown.

We were told that a new airport terminal and control tower will be built at the other (east) end of the runway, but just what this will be for, and whether or not the old one will be dismantled is still in question. At least three versions are being told around the village: 1) the old one will be torn down; or, 2) the old one will be used by another airline (Which one? Who knows?); or, 3) one will be used by the Chilean Air Force, or maybe for private charter flights. Someone insisted there were to be three terminals. So take your pick from these delicious rumors. Something is happening and we hope to have some hard facts, one of these days. At least the strange plan to build the control tower in the shape of a *moai* has been abandoned due to objections by local islanders.



MAINTENANCE OF AHU and other archaeological sites seems to be a low priority these days. Many sites are covered with vegetation, with weeds growing on the *ahu* ramps, and Ahu Nau Nau at 'Anakena has sand encroaching rapidly on the back of the *ahu*. If not removed, it will soon cover the archaeological debris now located behind the sea wall.

The walls built at Tongariki and Papa Vaka to protect the petroglyph sites from cattle and horses are broken down, and not repaired. But the worst cases involve houses built on, or in

close proximity to the ancient *ahu*. At Tongariki, a new two-story house looms over the south wing of the *ahu*, in clear view. Despite the fact that the land is in the National Park, this eyesore was built by an islander with money given to him by a rich Dutchman who has come to live on the island. The building plans were created by the man from Holland, with the help of a poet and an artist (imported for the occasion). The structure is rather boat-shaped.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

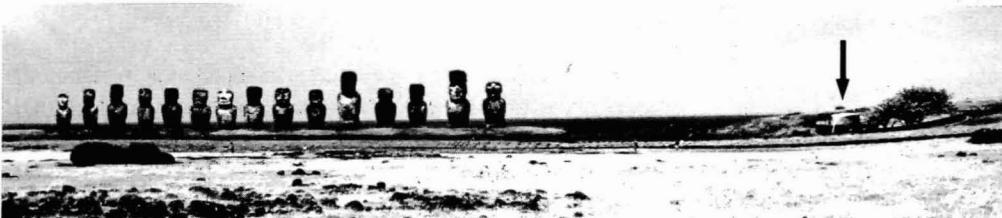
Many problems face Rapa Nui today. Some of these are caused from the outside, but many others are created here, on the island itself. The giveaway of land in recent years, while admirable, has resulted in the building of *paepae* [shacks] on archaeological sites, including those most visited by tourists. Visitors who come from all the far points in the world to see the archaeological treasures of this island do not come to see untidy shacks, barbed wire fences, and herds of animals wandering around the sites. These things destroy the ambience of the sites.

Islanders who live in the areas near archaeological sites should be aware of the importance of camouflage. Houses and roofs can be painted to blend in with the area, and shrubs and trees can be planted to hide the buildings from view. Not all offenders are Rapanui. A new government installation that includes three large white greenhouses looms clearly above Ahu Akivi. This project is a government plan to grow flowers, but the buildings could be disguised by plantings.

According to Chilean law, building restrictions should be reviewed every five years, but there appears not to be any restrictions on Rapa Nui regarding what, or how, something can be built on the island. So with a lack of plans to manage the island, small shacks spring up and some of these are directly on archaeological sites. This can be seen near the Museo Sebastian Englert where a *paepae* is built directly on the *ahu* platform. This is not only unsightly, it is denigrating to our ancestors, and disrespectful of the sacredness of the ancient shrine.

Other examples of the lack of planning can be seen throughout the village where abandoned half-finished shells of buildings can be seen on nearly every street. Government funds are available to repair and upgrade houses (up to US \$7000). Repairs are subject to inspection and thus few islanders avail themselves of this option.

Another problem concerns livestock. There are more horses and cattle than the island can support. There is not enough grassland nor water. And yet, there are no controls on the size of herds. Several archaeological sites have *pirca* [stone walls] erected to keep animals out. But these are not well maintained so that livestock are seen on the *ahu*, on the petroglyphs, and rubbing against statues



The ambience at Ahu Tongariki has changed; now there is a two-story house directly behind the west wing of the *ahu* (arrow). It is not possible to see the *ahu* without this new eyesore clearly in view.

in the quarry at Rano Raraku. Many Rapanui have large numbers of horses, but use only a few; thus animals are left to roam. They not only eat the grass, they eat introduced plants that make them ill and often result in death. Keeping herds of animals without systematically culling the herds makes no economic sense. Old cattle do not become larger, only tougher. And now sheep and goats have been introduced into the island. What purpose do these serve? Both are noted for the damage they do to the environment and it was only a few years ago that the huge herds of sheep were eliminated. Why have they been brought back to our island, which already suffers from the effects of over-grazing?

Our island needs many things, but first and foremost it needs some thoughtful planning and then someone to carry out and enforce those plans. Such measures will ensure that this island remains a destination of value and importance as a world heritage site, unique in the world. As tourism is our main industry, we should create plans to insure that Rapa Nui will retain its special character and the ambience that it now has. Tourists do not travel here to see cattle, high-rise buildings, or shacks on the sites. Having a plan for the future will create a better future for all.

Nicolas Haoa Cardinale, Hangarua

ON THE ORIGIN OF THE RAPANUI

Dear Editor,

Roger Green (2000) attempts to establish that the original Rapanui settlers were Polynesian, so that the origins issue becomes "no longer much of a mystery." He dismisses all other origin theories, which range from the Indus to South America. Fortunately, and in the very next article (synchronicity and spatiality at work again), Edwin Ferdon provides counter-evidence. He demonstrates that the *hare moa* structures, erroneously believed to be the chicken coops, were actually burial sites, albeit burials involving dismemberment of the entombed. He descends into speculation, however, when he posits that it was the Rapanui chickens' "idle curiosity" which led them to enter the tombs to discover serendipitously a welcome died supplement of human bone meal¹.

These two speculative articles are readily superseded by a previously-unpublished theory of Rapanui origins. Although Tibetans habitually dismember their dead and expose them to avian scavengers in the well-known "sky burial," the lack of a strong Tibetan naval tradition precludes them from primary consideration. In the same geographical area, however, the littoral Parsis expose their dead, in the famous Towers of Silence, to the work of vultures². Hindus also leave sacred bodies, such as cows, to birds for disposal.

Recently the vulture population of the Parsi area of Bombay has undergone marked decline, causing severe corpse disposal problems (Harding 2000)³. It is possible, then, to postulate a similar vulture population crash c-1500 B.P., prompting Parsis (along with some Hindus and Tibetans) to take to the ocean in search of more vulturine-friendly biomes⁴.

On encountering Easter Island, these proto-Rapanui were exhausted and culturally depleted. Nevertheless, they build the

feeble structures which we have erroneously called chicken coops for the exposure of the dead. Unfortunately, ancient Easter Island had neither birds of prey nor scavengers. The settlers were therefore reduced to using domestic chickens. Chickens being chickens, they did a very poor job, thus accounting for the many scattered human bones observed by later European visitors.

J. Douglas Porteous, University of Victoria

FOOTNOTES

¹On Saturna Island, B.C., where I am currently working, folklore insists that chickens are insufficiently intelligent to display "idle curiosity." Indeed, the Council of Elders insists that chicken intelligence is much improved after slaughter. I have observed this phenomenon many times.

²This commendable ecologically-sound process might profitably be adopted more widely.

³We hypothesize that recent vulturine population losses are due to the Westernization of the Parsi diet, involving a more toxic "fast-food" input.

⁴More research, of course, is needed.

REFERENCES

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- Green, R. C. 2000. Origins for the Rapanui of Easter Island before European Contact. Solutions from Holistic Anthropology to an Issue no Longer Much of a Mystery. *Rapa Nui Journal* 14(3): 71-76.
- Harding, L. 2000. Threat to Parsi rites as Indian vultures face extinction. *Guardian Weekly*, 5-11, October 3.

Dear Editor,

I want to thank you for the conference on the Big Island of Hawai'i. As a Rapanuiphile of six years, it was a pleasure to feel I was in Rapa Nui again, seeing and hearing the *aloha* everyone has for this little island. And that is why I am writing (aside from the *mahalo*). I am concerned that our little island is being loved to death, what with buckets of earth being overturned, and bones being counted, and *moai* being measured, after a while it will literally be no stone unturned.

My recommendation is that all those who have *aloha* for the 'aina of Rapa Nui, who have made their reputation (degrees, book royalties) off it, now tithe in order to pay their respect and it help the Rapanui people. Giving a copy of your book doesn't do it, 10% of your royalties might. Or if you are affiliated with an institution, mentor a young person so they can get their education. And mentor them diligently. Get them admitted to your university, tutor them, give them music lessons, whatever it takes to keep them going. Be their foster parent (through the good times and the difficulties), and don't give up until that student has achieved a level of independence the student needs to enable him/her to be independent and return, if they wish to, to Rapa Nui, and to help others.

If your life has depended upon the reputation you gained from Rapa Nui, then pay it forward, give somebody else a hand, and let's keep Rapa Nui healthy and there for us to keep loving.

Gerry DeBenedetti Honolulu, Hawai'i.